

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SCOTTISH APPROACHES TO PARLIAMENT 1975.

ON TOUCHING BASE THIS PAST WEEK WITH A REPRESENTATIVE SELECTION OF SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARIANS, INCLUDING LABOURITES JIM SILLARS, JOHN SMITH, JOHN MACKINTOSH, JOHN ROBERTSON, PETER DOIG, CONSERVATIVES ALEX FLETCHER, NICHOLAS FAIRBAIRN, JAMES DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, AND DOUGLAS CRAWFORD AND DOUGLAS HENDERSON OF SNP, THE FOLLOWING IMPRESSIONS WERE GLEANED OF THINGS TO COME DURING THIS SESSION OF PARLIAMENT OF INTEREST TO SCOTS:

A. OIL LEGISLATION. DESPITE SNP ATTACK FOR SOFTENING POLICIES TOWARDS OIL COMPANIES, LABOUR VOICES OF AUTHORITY UP HERE ARE SPEAKING IN PRAGMATIC TERMS. DANGER SIGNALS AS ILLUSTRATED BY BURMAH AND AMOCO HAVE BEEN SEEN, AND THE GOVERNMENTS APPROACH TO TAXATION AND PARTICIPATION WILL BE MORE RESPONSIBLE AND LESS ALARMING THAN ORIGINALLY VIEWED BY INDUSTRY. LABOURITES WERE CRITICAL OF PRESS ATTACKS FOR "HARSH" PRT DECISIONS, SINCE NO DECISIONS HAVE YET BEEN TAKEN. HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL NEGOTIATIONS ARE IN PROCESS ON WHAT CONSTITUTES A 'FAIR RETURN' WHICH BOTH SIDES CONSIDER ESSENTIAL, AND THE BALL IS IN THE INDUSTRIAL CAMP. IT IS RECOGNIZED THAT THERE IS NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO PRODUCTION

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ASAP, AND NO DEPLETION RESTRAINTS WILL BE PLACED ON FIELDS

DISCOVERED TO DATE. THE PRINCIPLE OF VARIATIONS IN TAX FOR MARGINA FIELDS HAS BEEN ADOPTED, BUT THE COMPLICATIONS INVOLVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE ARE HORRENDOUS FOR BOTH GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY. LABOUR TIMETABLE IS A BILL BY EASTER.

THE PETROLEUM BILL COVERING PARTICIPATION AS WELL AS FUNDAMENTAL GAPS IN BRITISH LAW, EG. PIPELINES, WILL TAKE LONGER TO COMPLETE. THE BRITISH NATIONAL OIL COMPANY IS 'NOT NEGOTIABLE' BUT ITS SHARE OF PARTICIPATION IN INDIVIDUAL LEASES AND OPERATIONS IS NEGOTIABLE AND 'VOLUNTARY'. INDUSTRY NEGOTIATORS REPORTEDLY ARE LESS CONCERNED WITH PARTICIPATION WITH BNOC THAN THE TAX PROBLEMS DESCRIBED EARLIER. LOCATION OF BNOC HEADQUARTERS IN SCOTLAND HAVE NOT BEEN DECIDED. NO CLEAR RESPONSE WAS GIVEN TO THE QUESTION OF WHAT HAPPENS TO THE COMPANY WHICH REFUSES 'VOLUNTARY' NATIONALIZATION.

B. DEVOLUTION. IT WAS CLEAR THAT ALL SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARIANS WOULD BE ENGAGED IN AN INTENSIFYING STRUGGLE TO OBTAIN A NORTHERN SHIFT OF POLICY-MAKING AND TANGIBLE EVIDENCE THEREOF IN SCOTLAND. WHEREAS CRITICISM OF SNP FOR IRRESPONSIBILITY PERSISTS, THERE SEEMED TO BE A DEVELOPING SENSE OF EMERGING SCOTTISH, NOT UNITY, BUT PARALLELISM. 'POST-MIDNIGHT' PARLIAMENTARY CONSIDERATION OF LEGISLATION AFFECTING SCOTS APPEARS INTER ALIA TO RAISE HACKLES AND CREATE CAUCUS AMONG SCOTS IN LONDON. DEBATE SURROUNDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SCOTTISH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (SDA) SHOULD PROVIDE LITMUS FOR THE SPEED AND EXTENT OF MOVEMENT TOWARDS A SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY. ALTHOUGH IRONICALLY, ACCORDING TO A CONSERVATIVE LEADER, 'NO PART OF THE UK HAS RECEIVED SO MUCH SPECIAL ATTENTION AS SCOTLAND, MORE MUST BE DONE IF THE FIELD IS NOT TO BE ABANDONED TO SNP. NOT ONLY ARE SCOTS MEETING THROUGH THE SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE (ALL 71 MEMBERS) AND STANDING COMMITTEES ON INDIVIDUAL PIECES OF LEGISLATION, BUT IT IS EXPECTED THAT A SCOTTISH SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE DIFFERENT PARTY LEADERS WILL BE RECONSTITUTED. PERHAPS THE MAIN ISSUE WILL BE DEVOLUTION OF SCOTTISH POWERS OVER TRADE AND INDUSTRY, PLUS REVENUE FROM NORTH SEA OIL.

C. OTHER ISSUES. IF, AS IS GENERALLY ASSUMED, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE, CENTRIFUGAL TENDENCIES ARE EXPECTED TO INCREASE. THIS WOULD MEAN AN INCREASING ROLE FOR SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARIANS OF ALL HUES. WHEREAS LABOUR SOURCES UNCLASSIFIED

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GENERALLY POOH-POOH THE CHANCES OF A LASTING BREAK IN THEIR RANKS BETWEEN LEFT AND EXTREME LEFT, OTHERS HERE ARE LESS SURE. ONE PROMINENT LABOUR REPRESENTATIVE SPOKE IN TERMS RESUMBLING THE SNP SCENARIO TOWARDS THE EEC, IE, THAT THE PRO-MARKETEERS WOULD SURVIVE THE REFERENDUM, BUT THE POLLS WOULD SHOW SCOTLAND NEGATIVE. IF SO, THE GOVERNMENT COULD BE PLACED IN JEOPARDY FROM AN ALLIANCE OF SOCIALISTS AND NATIONALISTS, WITH THE LATTER USING THE SCHISM TO DEMAND A SEPARATE SCOTTISH VOICE IN THE EEC, IE, 'NO TAXATION

WITHOUT REPRESENTATION'. SNP ADHERES TO A GAULLIST VIEW OF
'UNION OF STATES' WITH A SINGLE ECONOMIC MARKET FROM THE ATLANTIC
TO THE URALS AND NO SURRENDER OF NATIONAL POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE
BY SCOTLAND. SCOTLAND WOULD JOIN OPEC IN THIS
EPOCHAL SCENARIO (SIC).
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